

The University and the Learning Economy

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Old and new tasks for universities

- To train students to become skilful analysts and through research to develop the generic knowledge base for societal activities remain the core functions of universities.
- The European debate on universities has taken a utilitarian turn - with reference to a dubious interpretation of the US-system.
- Risk for irrevocable damage to the innovation system

Shift in perspective on university reflects shifts in analytical models

- Mode 2 production of knowledge assumed to follow after mode 1
- Innovation policy assumed to follow technology policy that came after science policy
- Interactive and systemic approach to innovation assumed to follow the linear approach
- *The challenge is actually to overcome quite contradictory requirements simultaneously.*

The knowledge society - and universities as central banks for knowledge

- In ‘the knowledge society’ progress in culture, the quality of life and the economy is dependent on having ways to decide what is **reliable knowledge** (cf. Gurus, Enron)
- Universities have played a role as sites where distinctions are made between more or less reliable knowledge. This has been one major rationale for their relative autonomy.
- In a monetary economy ‘autonomous’ central banks guarantee the reliability of money. In a knowledge society there is a similar need in relation to knowledge.
- This function grows in importance but has few spokesmen outside ‘conservative academia’.

The learning economy - and the need to integrate universities into the over all innovation systems

■ More rapid transformation

- Shorter product life cycles
- Shorter life **time** for competences (halving time = 1 year for computer engineers)
- Success of people, firms and regions reflect capability to learn

■ Universities in the learning economy

- Letting students learn to learn and open up for life-long education
- Need to speed up knowledge production and its transfer
- Development of new interdisciplinary fields
- Biomed. research as a specific case of near market basic research

Networking between organisations is constituted by relationships between people

- Links to universities reflect the presence of academic personnel and of specific alumni
- Regional intra-sectoral mobility of labour - including of managers - knit regional nets in industrial districts
- Job shifts within firms and between firms and knowledge institutions give more dense knowledge based networks - competition clauses and share options may have the opposite effect

University - the growing tension between being a central bank and a shopping centre

- Univ. as supplier of last resort of reliable knowledge (the central banks of the knowledge society)
- Univ. as shopping centre for supply of short term information to industry and the public
- Good practises might be **new ways to organise** knowledge management that make it possible to fulfil the many contradictory functions at the same time (education, life-long learning, basic research, applied research, interaction with users).

On the need for differentiated institutional solutions

- Focus on reform of academic training and on linking education to the rest of society. Problem orientation and elements of practise in education.
- Establish intermediaries to get stronger links between universities and industry. The importance of knowledge intensive business services.
- Specify technology/knowledge areas where there is aneed for direct interaction.
- Make it more attractive to move between the two worlds.